



EXHIBIT 7  
DATE 3-24-09  
SB SB 9

## Now is the opportunity to bring back rail - Tuesday, February 10, 2009

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Michael Ackley lives in Missoula, which means that if he wants to attend a legislative hearing in Helena, he drives there. He's done so twice this session, and plans on making the trip again within the next few weeks.

But if Ackley's efforts are ultimately successful, he will one day take a passenger train to the state Capitol instead. Ackley, who is with the National Association of Railroad Passengers, supports several bills that would help fund passenger rail service in Montana - and is helping to push the idea of resurrecting a rail line through the southern portion of the state.

It has been 30 years now since Missoula was a stop on the North Coast Hiawatha Route, which connected the Garden City to Billings, Bozeman and Butte, among others. Although many fans of train travel have long wanted to see the old line reinstated and the idea has widespread support, the biggest obstacle is a question of costs and who would pay them.

That's a question the current recession actually helps answer, Ackley explained: "If we tried to do this five years ago ... it would have been a lot more difficult. This is the best opportunity we've ever had."

That's because unpredictable gas prices and driving weather, coupled with a growing need to wean the nation off of foreign oil, have helped spur interest in passenger rail travel, he said. Amtrak has seen its ridership numbers increase steadily over the last few years - including in Montana. In fiscal year 2007, for instance, Amtrak counted more than 153,000 boardings and deboardings in the Treasure State. That number shot up to nearly 167,500 in fiscal year 2008.

Some people are concerned that a southern Montana route would steal passengers from other routes, Ackley noted, but more routes and connections actually tend to increase overall ridership. So an additional route through the state would likely bring more passengers to existing stops.

And Amtrak's Empire Builder, which follows Montana's Hi-Line, is already its most popular long-distance train. What's more, the Empire Builder saw increase in ridership of 9.8 percent

last year.

Amtrak reports that a study commissioned by the state of Montana found that the Empire Builder route has brought nearly \$14 million in economic benefits to Montana. That makes perfect sense to Ackley, who believes that an increase in passenger service would not only create some good jobs but also encourage economic growth in many other ways.

For instance, he often hears from elderly folks who don't like to drive or fly, and this portion of Montana's population is projected to continue to increase. A passenger rail line through Missoula would help more of these folks get to their medical appointments safely and reliably, while also encouraging more people to swing through Missoula to attend University of Montana football games, theater offerings and other events.

"That's economic development," Ackley said.

Last week, Missoula's City Council voted to support a state bill introduced by Sen. Ron Erickson, a Missoula Democrat, that requires Montana to update its state rail plan. Doing so would help the state qualify for federal funds for passenger rail service through the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act, which President Bush signed last fall.

Under the act, and at the request of the Montana Department of Transportation, Amtrak is currently studying the feasibility of a southern Montana route. That study will be completed by October.

Meanwhile, Senate Bill 283, the bill to update the state rail plan, had its first hearing before the Senate Highways and Transportation Committee last Tuesday. We hope the support it receives reflects the strong support it seems to have here in Missoula - as yet another sensible step on the long path toward bringing back passenger rail service.

And we would love to take the train from Missoula to Helena for the next legislative session.

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# MONTANA KAIMIN

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www.montanakaimin.com

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## ASUM to consider supporting a reopened Missoula Amtrak line

Josh Potter

MONTANA KAIMIN

ASUM will discuss a resolution tonight encouraging the Montana legislature to pass a bill funding the reopening of an Amtrak line through Missoula.

The route, which closed January 1979, would connect Missoula, Bozeman and Billings.

Scott Martin, the assistant for the director of ASUM's Office of Transportation, said the route would help the Missoula community so that "students who live in the southern part of Montana have other means of travel than bus and individual, single traveler vehicles."

Since Amtrak is federally funded, local governments need to reinvest in creating the necessary infrastructure to open this route, MontPIRG member Shayna Price said.

The Montana Senate bill that ASUM may decide to support would supply some of those funds by opening up the Montana coal bed trust fund to give loans to local governments.

"Local governments need to do

some investment to show the federal government they're willing to put in a railway," Price said.

Martin said that the railway would not only benefit a large part of the student population but would also encourage students to use more energy-efficient means of travel.

"A lot of students don't have cars," Martin said. "And if they do, gas prices will probably go up."

On Monday, Price explained to ASUM senators the importance of supporting state and federal lawmakers in transportation issues, especially now that the Montana State Legislature is primed to discuss a number of transportation bills.

ASUM and MontPIRG are in a unique position, Price said, because Montana Senator Max Baucus is the main author of a future Congressional bill dealing with the issue of infrastructure and maintenance of roads.

Price explained that Baucus will ask that any new highway bill will focus more on investing in local communities "so they can figure out what they need."

Price also asked that ASUM consider joining the Transportation for America Campaign to show Baucus and other Montana lawmakers their support for transportation reform.

The campaign is a national coalition of local governments and public interest groups aimed at implementing nation-wide transportation reform.

"It's focusing on finding solutions for our transportation issues in America," Price said.

The main goal that Transportation for America is focusing on right now, Price said, is changing the way national and state governments deal with highways.

Coming at an opportune time, the bill discusses the pending economic stimulus package, Price said. She said that the Transportation for America Campaign is hopeful that the package will set aside money for more transportation reforms.

"By putting all our energy into building new roads, we're not focusing on the maintenance or infrastructure of roads," Price said.

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DATE 3-24-09  
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Statement of

Michael C. Ackley, Member

National Association of Railroad Passengers

Submitted for the record of the

Committee on State Government

Tuesday, March 24, 2009

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SB 9 - Revenue Bonds for Transet

My name is Michael Ackley, resident of Missoula, MT and a member of the National Association of Railroad Passengers. I would like to thank the committee on State Government for the opportunity to speak in favor of Senate Bill 9. Trains both freight and passenger can help strengthen the economy and improve national security. Rail service consumes significantly less energy per passenger mile than cars, air service and trucks. Passenger service provides increasingly important travel choices for everyone, especially those on limited budgets and decreased mobility, i.e. the elderly, students and families. I have talked with numerous groups of people regarding the possibility of reestablishing passenger rail service through southern Montana and the enthusiasm was overwhelming. Maintaining the Empire Builder along the Highline is essential. In calendar year 2007 the boardings and deboarding on the Empire Builder within Montana was 153,760. That figure for calendar year 2008 increased to 167,455. An increase in ridership of just under 13,700. With climate change, congested roads, unstable gas prices and a national goal to ween ourselves off of foreign oil these figures are only going to escalate. We need to look for new transportation and energy

solutions. An increase in passenger rail infrastructure will create good quality jobs. The state of Montana needs a national network of modern, high quality passenger trains to serve all Americans.

It was a pleasure to share my concerns with the committee on this important issue.

Thank you.

Michael Ackley

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